

This 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Voting Rights Act provides an important moment to reflect on the Act's successes and the continuing challenges that face voters as we exercise our fundamental right to vote. Recently, the ongoing debate on these pages has centered on Voter ID provision that has been passed by the Georgia Legislature.

Last fall's federal election demonstrated that, while we are making progress, we still have a long way to go to ensure that all eligible voters have the opportunity to cast a meaningful ballot. Unfortunately, the voter ID bill passed by the Georgia Legislature will take us in the wrong direction by disenfranchising countless eligible Georgia voters. Despite claims that the provision will combat fraud, requiring identification at the polls will do nothing to safeguard the system from the kind of misconduct that can lead to voters being denied their right to vote. Instead of requiring photo identification, we should focus on solving the real problems of misconduct in our electoral system.

In pieces such as those written on this page by columnist Jim Wooten, rumor, speculation and tales are put forth in place of fact. Evidence of widespread identity fraud among voters personally appearing to vote – the only type of fraud an ID requirement would address -- does not exist. Indeed, an extensive academic inquiry into election fraud from 1992 to 2002 found that the incidence of ineligible voters affecting election outcomes is minimal across the fifty states.

Secretary of State Cathy Cox wrote to the Governor when opposing the photo ID requirement that she could not recall one documented case of voter fraud during her tenure as Secretary of State or Assistant Secretary of State that specifically related to the impersonation of a registered voter at voting polls.

The same has been found to be true in other states. In Ohio and Washington State investigators found that ineligible voters had no impact on election results, even in some of the closest elections in the country.

Mr. Wooten's numbers provide little, if any, evidence of polling place fraud. While he cites a number of instances of allegedly invalid voter registration forms, he presents no evidence of any voter actually going to the polls and casting a fraudulent vote. In fact, these voters never even made it onto the registration rolls. Requiring a photo identification from voters will do nothing to address the type of problem Mr. Wooten seems to be concerned with.

What the photo ID requirement will do is disenfranchise voters, particularly seniors, the poor, people with disabilities, people with large households, urban residents and other traditionally disenfranchised voters. These populations are least likely to own motor vehicles and possess a driver's license -- the most commonly accepted form of identification.

The League of Women Voters and the American Association of Retired Persons estimated that 152,664 people over the age of 60 in Georgia who voted in 2004 did not have a Georgia driver's license and were unlikely to have another form of photo ID. According

to advocates nearly 10 percent of Americans do not have a driver's license or other form of state-issued photo ID. Even if this type of ID is provided for free, there are many procedural obstacles to obtaining IDs.

As former President Bill Clinton said in Atlanta this week, "there are efforts being made to restrict access to the vote under the guise of preventing voter fraud...look at this Georgia Bill. If you're a student [at Georgia Tech] you can [use your student ID to vote]. If you're a student at Morehouse, it doesn't count because that's not a state-issued card."

In order to improve the confidence and accuracy of our elections we must present effective solutions to real problems. Combating misconduct in the electoral system is crucial but we must recognize that fraud in the electoral system takes many forms. It includes actions of election officials improperly removing eligible voters from the registration rolls. It includes private individuals and organizations providing false information to voters to prevent them from voting. It includes deliberately intimidating voters to keep them away from the ballot box. We need to concentrate on implementing provisions to address the type of fraud that leads to eligible voters being denied their fundamental right to cast a ballot.

I hope that rather than hold out the false promise of a useless remedy, Georgians will join with me to ensure that our election system in Georgia is fair and works for all eligible voters.

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